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Iglesias Pantín, Santiago

Agricultural legislation as it  
affects Puerto Rico

[S.I.]

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# Agricultural Legislation As It Affects Puerto Rico

EXTENSION OF REMARKS OF  
HON. SANTIAGO IGLESIAS  
RESIDENT COMMISSIONER FROM PUERTO RICO  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

308

Z

Box 467

Reprinted from the  
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## Agricultural Legislation As It Affects Puerto Rico

Mr. IGLESIAS. Mr. Speaker, in view of the agricultural and sugar legislation pending before the Committee on Agriculture, I feel it my duty, as Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico, to set forth Puerto Rico's position relative to this proposed legislation.

At the outset I would like to make clear Puerto Rico's legal and economic status in the Union. By the Treaty of 1898 Spain ceded Puerto Rico to the United States. By that treaty Puerto Rico came to the Union as a permanent addition to our territory with the acquiescence and consent of all Americans. General Miles, in his proclamation to the people of Puerto Rico, on July 28, 1898, said:

"We bring you protection, not only to yourselves, but to your property, to promote your prosperity, and bestow upon you the immunities and blessings of the liberal institutions of our Government."

### Puerto Rico Is Part of the United States

Following the proclamation and Spain's cession in the treaty, Puerto Rico, a completely organized Territory, became an integral part of the Union. All of its resources duly became a part of those of the mainland, and by congressional act in 1917, all of its inhabitants became citizens of the United States.

Since then Puerto Rico has stood by the flag in peace and in war. Her soldiers fought side by side with those from the States in the great World War.

Puerto Rico is now the greatest territory of the United States; largest from the standpoint of population; and largest from the standpoint of purchases of mainland products. It ranks ahead of all areas in the Western Hemisphere, except Canada, as a market for mainland products. It purchases more products from continental United States than all other market areas except five—United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, France, and Germany. Puerto Rico purchases more from the States than do such countries as Belgium, Italy, Netherlands, China, or Mexico, or than Cuba.

Its purchases include those of the farm and factory. It ranks first as a market for rice, purchasing from the mainland in 1936 more than 10 times as much as all foreign countries combined. It ranks third as a market for mainland lard, and second as a market for all our meat products. It ranks second as a purchaser of wheat flour, first as a market for shoes, and holds a high rank for many other products of the farm and factory.

Anonymous Gift  
7-28-37

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*Rank of Puerto Rico as a market for specified products of continental United States, 1935 and 1936*

Product	Rank in—	
	1935	1936
All edible animal products .....	2	2
All meat products .....	2	2
Lard .....	3	3
Dairy products .....	3	2
All inedible animal products .....	3	3
Shoes .....	1	1
All edible vegetable products .....	3	3
Rice .....	1	1
Wheat flour .....	2	2
All inedible vegetable products .....	9	7
Cigarettes .....	2	2
Rubber footwear .....	2	1
Textiles .....	9	7
Wood and paper products .....	7	5
Chemicals .....	5	3
Medicinal and pharmaceutical preparations .....	5	4
Fertilizer .....	5	3
Soap and toilet preparations .....	1	1

All of its purchases from the mainland are transported in American bottoms. It purchases practically all of its services, such as insurance and the like, from the mainland. It returns a higher percentage of its trade dollar to the mainland than any other area selling sugar in the continental United States markets.

**Ranks Sixth as a Market**

Puerto Rico not only ranks next to the five leading markets of the world as a market for mainland products but purchases are increasing faster than those of all other areas. Purchases from the mainland increased 23 percent in 1936 over 1935, whereas exports to foreign countries increased only about 8 per cent. Since American occupation the island has risen from almost nothing as a market for mainland goods to a ranking of sixth among all the areas of the world.

*Rank of customers of continental United States in order of amount purchased during 1936*

	[Thousand dollars]
1. United Kingdom .....	\$439,950
2. Canada .....	383,952
3. Japan .....	204,312
4. France .....	129,535
5. Germany .....	100,585
6. Puerto Rico .....	86,352
7. Hawaii .....	85,744
Cuba .....	67,432
Philippines .....	60,351

Not only does Puerto Rico rank sixth as a market for continental goods, but it buys a smaller proportion of what it consumes from foreign countries than does the United States as a whole. In 1936 Puerto Rico bought only 6 per cent of its total consumption from foreign countries, whereas the United States (no data for individual States available) bought from foreign countries approximately 7 per cent of all goods consumed.

**Island Is a Preferential Market**

While the island is one of the largest and most rapidly growing markets for the products of farms and factories in continental United States, it also is a preferential market because it pays higher prices for its purchases, on the average, than foreign buyers pay.

The Island, of course, is a part of the United States and not a foreign market and for that reason it ordinarily pays the full domestic price for what it buys. Thus, it returns to domestic farmers and manufacturers substantially greater amounts for most of the goods it buys than could be realized by selling the same goods to foreign countries.

Puerto Rico is an integral part of our national defense, and serves as the first line of defense for the Panama Canal. It is the gateway to our Latin-American countries. The policies of the mainland toward Puerto Rico are carefully scrutinized by Latin-American countries generally as a basis of their policy toward the United States. The graduates of its University and School of Tropical Medicine are among the leading scientists of Pan-American and South American countries, many of them holding responsible official positions in these countries.

With its large population, and its productive farm land, the island possesses the qualifications for becoming an even larger purchaser of the products of the mainland farms and factories. Its large population, in proportion to its natural resources, forces the island to become an effective trading center. It must sell in our mainland markets the products for which its resources are adapted, and in turn purchase a very large part of all it consumes.

For more than a century sugar has been one of the leading sources of income. In most years since 1905 the income from sugar has represented around two-thirds of the income of the entire island. This is not because it prefers to produce sugar in preference to other products, but because sugar enables it to make the most intensive use of its land resources. Sugar provides a larger income per acre, and more work per acre, than any other crop for which the island's agricultural resources are adapted. In fact, more dollars are paid to labor alone for producing a ton of sugar than the total returns from practically any other crop that can be grown on the land.

Puerto Rico has supplied the mainland with sugar since American occupation and the island's increase in production has been about in proportion to the increases in other domestic areas. Its share of the mainland's sugar requirements is still small, being only about 12.4 percent of the total. However, Puerto Rico's share is more important to Puerto Rico than is the share of any other area to that respective area. This is due, of course, to the fact that Puerto Rico is more dependent upon the income from sugar than is the case of any State.

### Sugar is Lifeblood of the Island

Sugar is truly the lifeblood of the island, providing more employment than any other industry, and paying directly or indirectly about three-fourths of the island's public revenue. It provides the backbone of the economic structure of the island and directly or indirectly is the basis for nearly all industrial activity.

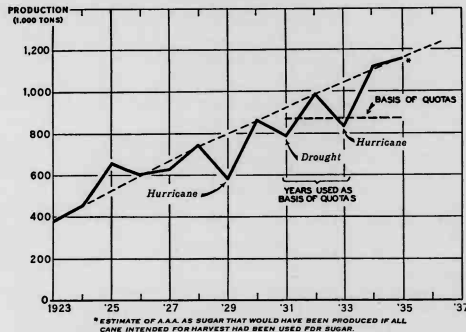
The dependence of Puerto Rico upon sugar was recognized by the Secretary of Agriculture in a press release of May 1, 1937, when he said that if the distribution of quotas were to be made on the basis of the need of the members of local sugar-producing communities, it was believed that Puerto Rico would be the first area to receive an increase.

At the time the Agricultural Adjustment program went into effect Puerto Rico had just recovered from two serious outbreaks of sugar cane disease. These diseases struck other areas as well as Puerto Rico, and for a time threatened to annihilate the cane-sugar industry. They reduced yields by about one-half in Puerto Rico, and even more in some other areas.

### Production Reduced by Drought, Hurricanes

The series of years provided in the Jones-Costigan Act (1925-33) from which to select 3 years as a basis for quotas included mostly this period of low production. The 3 years used for establishing a base quota fell in this recovery period,

### PRODUCTION IN BASE YEARS REDUCED BY DROUGHT AND HURRICANES



and it so happened that in 2 of the years designated as base years, yields in Puerto Rico were reduced substantially because of abnormal weather conditions. In 1931, rainfall in the island was only about one-half of normal, and as a

result yields were very low. In October 1932 a devastating hurricane struck the northern part of the island and reduced production there by approximately 40 per cent, which was reflected in the 1933 output. The result of including these two subnormal years in the years used as the basis for computing quotas was to give the island a base quota approximately 100,000 tons below that which it would have obtained if the yield had been normal in the base years. This situation was recognized by Congress at the time the legislation was passed and was given consideration in the early stages of the formation of the legislation, but, due to the necessity for a compromise to facilitate the passage of the legislation, Puerto Rico was forced to take a quota below that to which it was justly entitled.

### Effect of sugarcane diseases upon production in Puerto Rico

Year	Quantity of Sugar produced per acre in sugarcane	Year	Quantity of Sugar produced per acre in Sugarcane
	Tons		Tons
1925.....	2,725	1930.....	3,403
1926.....	2,498	1931.....	2,805
1927.....	2,669	1932.....	3,376
1928.....	3,160	1933.....	2,780
1929.....	2,337	1934.....	3,710

These data show a gradual increase from 1926 to 1934 resulting from increased use of disease-resistant varieties of cane. The exceptions are 1929, when production was reduced by the hurricane of October 1928; 1931, when production was reduced by lack of moisture; and 1933, when production was reduced by the hurricane of October, 1932.

By 1934, disease-resistant varieties of sugarcane were in use throughout the island, and the production of that year was approximately one-third larger than the year before, although the acreage was the same. The final quota for Puerto Rico (including local consumption) for 1934 was approximately 230,000 tons below the production of that year, all of which was completed prior to the Jones-Costigan legislation.

At that time a modern refinery had been developed in the island but had not reached its maximum production capacity. Puerto Rico's refined quota was established on the basis of what it had refined for the mainland market prior to the enactment of the legislation when the refining of sugar in the island was in process of development. Other refineries were being considered before the enactment of the Jones-Costigan legislation. Consequently, Puerto Rico's refined quota not only failed to provide a sufficient amount to enable the then existing refinery to operate efficiently and at capacity level, but precluded any further increase in refining.

In addition to receiving reduced raw quotas by reason of the abnormal weather,

conditions, the island did not participate in benefit payments on the basis of other areas. Neither the principle of parity, nor that of returning taxes paid on Puerto Rican sugar, was established as a basis for making benefit payments. The island was paid for the surplus cane in the 1935 crop an amount estimated to equal the expense of producing the cane at the time it was taken over by the Government. This was in no sense a benefit payment; neither was such a payment made to other domestic areas, owing to the fact that the adjustment of production in these other areas was negligible.

Puerto Rico received a benefit payment of 35 cents per ton of cane on the 1936 crop, which was by far the lowest rate of payment made to any of the domestic areas. At the same time it was forced to carry at a heavy expense approximately 230,000 tons of surplus sugar from the 1934 crop, the first year in which production was normal following the period of cane diseases and abnormal weather conditions.

#### **Puerto Rico Made Largest Reduction**

Puerto Rico made by far the greatest reduction in the production of sugar under the Jones-Costigan Act of any domestic area supplying the mainland. It actually reduced its production by approximately 370,000 tons in 1935 in order to come within its quota. Production in the 2 years 1935 and 1936 was reduced by around 600,000 tons, and more than 100,000 tons were still held in producers' warehouses at the beginning of 1937. Puerto Rico lived up to the letter and spirit of the Jones-Costigan Act, even though this reduction in production of approximately 600,000 tons of sugar resulted in a tremendous increase in the already burdensome unemployment population. Not only did this reduction in income and wages work a hardship upon farmers and labor but it resulted in a reduction in the already low revenues available for schools and health facilities.

Puerto Rico endured these discriminations and hardships with the feeling that it was contributing its part toward the rehabilitation of the sugar industry in all areas and with the full belief that when more permanent legislation was being developed its just quota would be restored.

The legislation that was proposed not only fails to restore the quota to which Puerto Rico was entitled at the time of the Jones-Costigan Act was effected, but it actually proposes a reduction of 8,000 tons of raw sugar, and continues to treat Puerto Rico on the basis of a foreign area in the matter of refined sugar.

#### **Island Is Huge Market for Farmers in States**

Puerto Rico's rights to share in the mainland sugar requirements on the same basis as other domestic areas are not based alone on a legal and moral basis but also on an economic basis. Puerto Rico buys more farm products per ton of sugar than does any other area supplying the mainland markets. Its purchases of farm products are equivalent to the yield of approximately 1,000,000 acres of mainland farm lands, divided principally among livestock producers, dairy farms, grain producers, rice growers, and truck farmers. This is nearly twice the amount of acreage required to produce the farm products purchased by Cuba. When freight, insurance, and capital payments are included with commodities, Puerto Rico returns to the mainland every dollar received for goods sold there.

While Puerto Rico's needs for increased quotas of raw and refined sugar are much greater than those of other areas, due to its heavy population and its lack of opportunity in other fields of production, it asks simply for equal treatment with that of other domestic areas, based on its traditional record as one of the domestic sugar producing areas, and on the basis of its record as a market for products of the mainland farms and factories. Puerto Rico has always spent practically every dollar received from the sale of products to the mainland in purchases of goods and services from the mainland.

We ask for the consideration which Puerto Rico, as an integral part of the United States, and which its record of supplying the mainland with sugar and providing the mainland with a market, rightfully deserves.

#### **Program for Puerto Rico**

I think it proper at this point that a presentation of some of the high spots of the program elaborated for the reconstruction of Puerto Rico as represented by the administration of Gov. Blanton Winship be submitted for the information of Members of Congress. These official declarations are worthy of Congress' best consideration.

Inauguration of plans for resettling thousands of Puerto Rican families on farm lands, where they may raise food crops for sale and for their own use, has been proposed as the next major step in Puerto Rico's extensive program of economic improvement.

It is estimated that there are 500,000 acres of farm land available for resettlement purposes, and plans have been drawn up for resettling on those lands many of the small farmers whose homes and crops were destroyed by the devastating hurricanes of 1928 and 1932. Most of those families, having no other place to go, moved down to the lowlands near San Juan, the island's capital, and other cities, where they now reside under unsatisfactory conditions.

Funds now being sought from the Resettlement Administration and other Federal agencies by Gov. Blanton Winship and the insular authorities would be used to purchase the lands, provide low-cost houses, supply the families with livestock, and train them in efficient farming methods. Most of the lands which would be acquired are located in the foothills in the interior of the island. The lands and equipment would be sold to the settlers on a long-term payment basis.

#### **Resettlement Already Is Started**

A start on the resettlement program already has been made by the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (P. R. R. A.), which recently purchased one of the largest sugar mills in Puerto Rico and is now perfecting a cooperative plan of operation in which 1,000 or more families will each acquire a share in the mill along with land on which to grow foods for their own use.

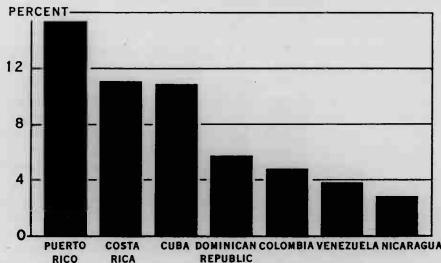
Realizing that the task of putting the island on a more satisfactory economic basis involves taking advantage of every possible source of increased employment and income for the people of the crowded island, Governor Winship has been encouraging the insular government, the P. R. R. A., and other Federal agencies, to exhaust every opportunity.

By following an aggressive program, the island has been improved along many



lines, economically, physically, and socially. Living standards have been rising steadily during recent years, public education has been improved markedly, new sources of employment have been found, and new cash crops are being developed. Progress has been made at such a rate, according to Governor Winship, that individuals whose knowledge of Puerto Rico was acquired 4 or 5 years ago, or longer, are now quite out of date.

PUERTO RICO HAS THE LARGEST PERCENTAGE OF HER  
TOTAL POPULATION ENROLLED IN SCHOOL  
OF ANY CARIBBEAN AREA



Unemployment has been a serious problem on the island for many years, just as it is on the mainland, but recent developments are encouraging. Until recently there were relatively few industries there, owing to the lack of capital and the scarcity of raw materials. Persistent research and ingenuity, however, have uncovered a number of new possibilities.

Glass manufacture, rum distilling, and gem cutting are among the more promising industries. Puerto Rico has a grade of sand which is particularly suitable for manufacturing glass, and the possibilities of that industry are being investigated carefully. The island last year supplied over one-third of all the rum shipped into the States, and production is even greater so far this year. Gem cutting is expected to expand also, as more laborers acquire skill at the trade.

#### Industries are Developing

The needlework and embroidery industry, for which the Puerto Ricans are famous, has been growing rapidly in the last 4 years, the value of the products shipped back to the States having increased from less than \$12,000,000 in 1932 to more than \$21,000,000 in 1936. Included in those figures are the linen manufacturers, including linen clothing which now provides considerable employment.

There even is a strong chance that the island will become a fairly important source of gold. One individual is reported to have invested about \$100,000 in equipment for taking gold from the mountain streams. Marble and manganese are being produced now in important quantities, and the hairnet, straw hat, and button industries show signs of expanding. Each new industry and each one that can be expanded means more employment and greater income for the people.

In the field of agriculture, also, important developments are taking place. Puerto Rico is trying particularly to develop new crops which can be sold in the States without competing with domestic agricultural products. The production of vanilla beans has been started and will receive close attention. Sea-island cotton is another promising crop for which there is a market in the States. Successful experiments are also being conducted with quinine plants and perfume-bearing plants. In addition, Puerto Rico is endeavoring to grow new types of bamboo which can be used for making furniture and for other uses, and is hoping to produce a grade of light tobacco which can be used for cigarettes. Its present tobacco crop is suitable only for higher-priced cigars, and the market for that crop is limited.

#### Hope To Regain Coffee Market

Concerted efforts also are being made to revive coffee production. The hurricanes almost wiped out the coffee crop so that the island subsequently lost its foreign markets. The insular government soon will start a campaign to popularize Puerto Rican coffee in continental United States. The island produces a rich, full-bodied coffee especially suitable for demitasse, but consumers in the States are not yet familiar with it. Inasmuch as all our coffee now is imported from foreign countries, Puerto Rico is determined to get a share of the huge market here.

As a further aid to agriculture, and as a means of increasing the island's food supply, the authorities also are encouraging the growing of vegetables, such as tomatoes and lettuce, and also corn. Puerto Rico now spends about \$28,000,000 a year for food purchased from farmers and manufacturers in the States, buying more food here than any foreign country except the United Kingdom. Even so, many of the island's people need a better balanced and more adequate diet.

Cooperatives have been formed to assist in the marketing of coffee and tobacco outside Puerto Rico, and other cooperative organizations are working toward more orderly marketing of food crops within the island.

#### Labor Conditions Show Progress

Puerto Rico is particularly proud of what has been accomplished in recent years on behalf of labor. Indeed, the island has set the pace for many of the States in this respect. It has, for example, a workmen's compensation law which is generally regarded as a model for any State, applying both to industrial and to agricultural labor. In addition, it has and strictly observes a child-labor law and an 8-hour day, which also is unique in that it applies to both the factory

and farm laborers. Strikes are infrequent and are settled peacefully and promptly, often through arbitration conducted by the insular government. Wages still are relatively low, but they have been increasing in the last few years to the point where total pay rolls on the island now are the highest in history. In the larger industries, wages are established under collective bargaining, with capital and labor working in harmony.

The laboring classes are well represented in the insular government. The island's treasurer and the commissioner of labor both are members of the Labor Party. Of the 19 senators in the insular legislature, 7 are members of that party; of the 39 representatives in the lower house, 15 represent labor.

Collective bargaining, just referred to, is only one of the many New Deal policies and programs which have been applied profitably to the island. Although Puerto Rico has had less regular and emergency Federal assistance per capita than any of the 48 States, it nevertheless has been treated generously and appreciates the help received. The P. W. A. has been improving waterworks, sewers, and schools. The P. R. R. A. is conducting reforestation and rural electrification projects which will permanently benefit the island.

In the reforestation work 20,000,000 young mahogany trees have been made available for planting to replace the once-plentiful timber supply of the island.

Through various Federal Government agencies Puerto Rico has received the benefits of soil-conservation programs and has had needed help from the Home Owners' Loan Corporation, the Federal land bank, the Farm Credit Administration, and others. In addition, a terracing program is to be undertaken in connection with the Resettlement project to preserve the soil on the inland slopes.

### Harbors Are Being Improved

Other physical improvements also are contributing to the economic betterment of the island. The harbor at San Juan has been deepened and the turning basin enlarged, so that the largest ships now can enter. Further improvements are contemplated. Other ports have been or are to be improved, thus facilitating commerce with the mainland of the United States.

A genuine building boom has been in progress during recent months and more building is contemplated. The splendid road system, consisting of almost 1,200 miles of hard-surfaced highway and other roads, is being added to and improved each year. Trout and other fish are being placed in some of the many mountain streams as an added attraction to tourists, who can travel to any part of the island on the highway system. Deep-sea fishing is as good there as any other place in the world.

Development of the tourist trade is being counted on to add to Puerto Rico's income. The island has a combination of climate, scenery, and other natural attractions which few resorts anywhere in the world can match. Visitors are especially interested in the historic monuments, including El Morro, the former home of Ponce de Leon's family; La Fortaleza, in which the Governor resides; and other appealing places of interest.

The Caribbean National Forest at Luquillo is described as a place of rare

beauty with luxuriant tropical vegetation. It has been equipped with tourist cabins, mountain walks, and two swimming pools fed by mountain streams.

The island is hoping that additional ships soon will be available to carry tourists there in greater numbers, and it is reported that private capital plans to provide still greater accommodations for visitors.

Federal funds have been available for some of these developments, but much of the progress has been effected through the funds of the insular government. Yet, even in the trying years just passed, the insular government has balanced its budgets and increased its surpluses. Greater spending for the public good has been accomplished under such conditions only by a policy of wise economy and by more efficient tax collections.

### Finances Are On Sound Basis

The credit of the island is good, with the result that it has been able to refinance certain of its bonded obligations at a reduced rate of interest and to sell the bonds at a premium. This resulted in an annual saving of \$60,000. In line with the policy of economy and business-like administration of the island's affairs, the cost of electric lights and power to the consumers in the three principal cities has been reduced about half a million dollars annually, and usury has been practically eliminated. Interest rates until a few years ago were quite high, and by reducing them, capital has been made available to many individuals who otherwise could not afford to borrow.

Puerto Rico has not hesitated to spend its revenues for worthy purposes, and one such purpose is education. Last year the insular and municipal governments spent more than \$6,000,000 for public-school education. That sum is nearly twice what the insular government spent for all purposes in 1898, indicating clearly that the Puerto Rican people are doing everything possible to raise their standards. There now is more than \$11,000,000 invested in school property, whereas in 1898 there was only one public building on the whole island which had been built to serve as a school.

And in the face of the already generous appropriations for public education, an additional million dollars has been budgeted for the coming fiscal year.

The island still has its problems, in spite of the tremendous progress it has made in recent years, but the people are attacking those problems intelligently and aggressively. It is doubtful whether any group of 1,800,000 people ever has equalled in the short space of 38 years the progress which Puerto Rico has made since it became a part of the United States. Socially and economically, the island already stands out among its Caribbean neighbors and can be expected to raise its status still higher as progress continues in the future.

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